



# Trends in the U.S. Retail and Food Service Industry

Hotel, Restaurant, Institutional and Retail

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## FACILITATING MEETINGS BETWEEN BUYERS AND SELLERS

Often, it can be a challenge to match up professional buyers and sellers for products sold by grocery stores, supermarket chains, and restaurants. Buyers need to meet as many people and see as many products as possible, in a short amount of time. Buyers often want to spend more time in the office doing their core duties, and less time traveling.

Sellers want to meet with as many buyers as possible, and often want to be closer to their manufacturing base. This edition of the newsletter will examine the new ways that trade organizations, private firms, and Foreign Agricultural Service posts are exploring to help buyers and sellers meet.



### National Restaurant Association Show

The National Restaurant Association (NRA) show, which takes place in Chicago May 20-23, 2006, is using a system called NRA Show Connect. NRA Show Connect is the online buying community for the registered conference attendees. NRA Show Connect provides reports to the buyers on which exhibitors carry the products they want. NRA Show Connect allows buyers to search the products, ask questions, and even schedule meetings with sellers.

The component of this system for exhibitors is SmartBooth™. SmartBooth™ is a system of Web-based prospecting tools. SmartBooth™ can help the exhibitors before, during, and after the show in contacting the appropriate buyers for their products. SmartBooth™ alerts the exhibitors when people register and express interest in their product categories.

### Efficient Collaborative Retail Marketing

Efficient Collaborative Retail Marketing (ECRM) is a new business process. Through a combination of planning sessions and a business-to-business (B2B) Web site, the ECRM process strives to increase sales and

streamline the sales and marketing function. In September in Miami, Florida, Charles Bowlus, CEO of ECRM, gave a demonstration.



Prior to the event, ECRM loaded color images and product information into their proprietary software, MarketGate™. At the event, key decision makers from the buying and selling companies met to view the items, promotional programs, or marketing concepts. Both parties documented their follow-up actions on electronic notepads provided by ECRM. After the event, each company was given a link to its own secured Marketing Activity Web site where they could review marketing notes and download images of the items selected.

Lisa Balsera, Vice President for Category Development at ECRM, had this to say about the September activity: "We had 70 retailers and distributors representing 54 countries to include Commercial Mexicana, DairyFarm, Ahold, Park 'N Shop, Cahrco and many more. Pre-qualified distributors attended from across the globe to find new suppliers and innovative products. Buyers loved seeing suppliers who were there specifically to talk about exporting. The manufacturers had one-on-one meetings with 70 buyers in three days saving them time and money in travel.

ECRM software helped both parties prepare for their scheduled meetings and facilitated follow up. All buyers were taken on store visits to key food outlets."

### **Canada Connect Matchmaker Program**

Canada Connect is an agriculture matchmaking service for U.S. food and beverage producers wishing to investigate the Canadian market for brokers/agents/distributors. This program is endorsed by the FAS office at the United States Embassy, Ottawa, Canada. The service providers are Faye Clack Marketing & Communications, Inc. for food and beverages, and Ketchin Sales & Marketing for wine.

The service provider in the Canada Connect Matchmaking program consults the client, contacts and pre-screens the prospective partners, and develops an appointment schedule. When the client arrives in Canada, the service provider briefs the client on local conditions, provides services such as communications and secretarial support, and accompanies the client to meetings with the potential suppliers.

More information on how to qualify and how to participate in the Canada Connect Matchmaking program can be found in Global Agriculture Information Network (GAIN) report #CA5060. GAIN reports can be found on <http://www.fas.usda.gov/scripts/attacherep/default.asp>. In this case, go to Option 3 *Search by AGR Number* and enter CA5060.

## Results of These New Approaches

It may be a little early to assess the savings in money and in travel time of these new approaches, but the potential for savings can be seen. For all of these new programs, the buyers know in advance of the meeting what the seller has to offer and their production capacity. The sellers know the buying potential of the purchaser. This knowledge can help lead to more informed decision-making by buyers and greater opportunities for sellers.



**F**or more information on facilitating meetings between buyers and sellers:

The Web site for the National Restaurant Association is <http://www.restaurant.org>.

The Web site for ECRM is <http://www.ECRM-Online.com>.

The Web site for the Foreign Agricultural Service office in Ottawa Canada is <http://www.usembassycanada.gov>, select “About the Embassy” and then select “Embassy Offices.” You will then see a link that says “U.S. Department of

Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service.”

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